

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3023
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AMEMBASSY LUSAKA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY GABORONE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LAGOS PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 06687

EXDIS

FOR EMBASSY CAPE TOWN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK, US
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: THE BRITISH AND THE US ROLE

1. ONE OF THE SUBJECTS OUR DELEGATION WILL DISCUSS WITH THE BRITISH ON WEDNESDAY WILL BE THE NATURE OF THE US ROLE AT A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE ON RHODESIA. MUGABE, NKOMO, AND SITHOLE HAVE NOW ANNOUNCED THEIR OPPOSITION TO US "COSPONSORSHIP", ESPECIALLY IF COSPONSORSHIP MEANS US PARTICIPATION IN THE NEGOTIATING SESSIONS. ONCE MUZOREWA--WHO MUST PARTICULARLY AVOID THE PUPPET IMAGE--HAS SNIFFED THE POLITICAL WINDS, HE TOO WILL PROBABLY REJECT THIS SPECIAL AMERICAN ROLE. SO WE ARE LIKELY TO FACE A RARE DEMONSTRATION OF NATIONALIST UNITY ON THIS ISSUE. MOREOVER, THERE IS NO REASON TO EXPECT THAT THE
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FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS WILL BE ANY MORE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT AMERICAN COSPONSORSHIP THAN THE BLACK LEADERS OF RHODESIA.

2. SMITH NO DOUBT FOUND OWEN'S PROPOSALS ATTRACTIVE, AT LEAST IN PART BECAUSE OF THE PROMISED AMERICAN PARTICIPATION. HE WOULD REGARD AN AMERICAN DELEGATION AT THE

CONFERENCE AS ASSURING BRITISH RESOLUTENESS AND AFRICAN MODERATION. TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF THAT INVOLVEMENT NOW WOULD GIVE SMITH ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF BRITISH PERFIDY, BUT OWEN'S TALKS WITH SMITH WERE SUFFICIENTLY TENTATIVE AND THE PROPOSED AMERICAN ROLE IS SUFFICIENTLY VAGUE THAT SMITH WOULD STILL BE INCLINED TO GO ALONG WITH A CONFERENCE IF THE FORM BUT NOT THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR ROLE WERE ALTERED.

3. THE REAL PROBLEM WITH AMERICAN "COSPONSORSHIP" IS HERE. OWEN SAYS HE WON CABINET APPROVAL FOR HIS INITIATIVE ON THE BASIS OF AMERICAN SUPPORT WHICH SPECIFICALLY INCLUDED A COMMITMENT TO SEND A LARGE DELEGATION TO PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. THE CABINET, HOWEVER, IS INSISTING ON EXTREMELY CLOSE AMERICAN IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SEARCH FOR A SETTLEMENT RATHER THAN ANY SINGLE MANIFESTATION OF OUR COMMITMENT. WE SUSPECT OWEN HAS MANEUVERING ROOM AMONG HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES, ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM PERSONALLY TO CHANGE HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE PROSPECTIVE AMERICAN ROLE. HIS SUBORDINATES IN THE FCO WILL NEED LITTLE CONVINCING THAT THE US ROLE NEEDS REEXAMINATION, AND THE MORE THIS LINE OF THINKING EVOLVES WITHIN THE FOREIGN OFFICE THE BETTER IT WILL BE FOR ANGLO-AMERICAN COOPERATION AS WE START DOWN A NEW RHODESIAN PATH.

4. THE DELEGATION HERE ON WEDNESDAY WILL WANT TO OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPLORING ALTERNATE ROLES FOR THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT AT THE SAME TIME CONVEYING TO CONFIDENTIAL

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OWEN OR HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES THAT WE ARE HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR OVERALL COMMITMENT.

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